

IBF String Machine Certification Frequently Asked Questions

1) Why did IBF approve string centers for Sport Bowling?

The IBF decided to approve string centers for Sport Bowling to ensure bowling operators and investors have a real choice in pinspotting technology – both free-fall and string technology are now viable options for Sport Bowling. At last, operators and investors who choose string machines as a way to make their businesses more efficient, profitable and sustainable, can continue to offer and engage in Sport Bowling.

This is particularly urgent considering the financial impact COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, on bowling centers throughout the world. Now more than ever, string pinspotting technology is needed to help centers overcome the financial damage as a result of mandatory shutdowns and ongoing social distancing measures imposed in most countries. The IBF could not sit still, desiring instead to help operators and investors with new ways to improve their operations to ensure long term growth and prosperity for the sport.

Additionally, as part of honouring the IBF commitment to the United Nations Sport for Climate Action Framework initiative, this decision was made to ensure a more environmentally and economically sustainable business option for bowling centers worldwide.

2) Some people say that string machines are bad for bowling. Why is the IBF position different in this respect?

After careful analysis and consideration the IBF concluded the opposite. Growth of our sport relies completely on bowling operators and investors. It is these people, and not the IBF or any of its member federations or our bowlers, who invest in the appropriate infrastructure for the practice and the sport of bowling.

String machines help operators and investors address many of the challenges that put strain on bowling businesses - like finding experienced technicians to maintain complex free fall machines, high pinspotter operational costs and poor machine reliability that can hurt the guest experience. String machines make it easier to deliver a great bowling experience, to both sport and casual bowlers alike.

Healthy bowling businesses mean there will be a reliable, long-term home for sport bowling and players of all kinds.

3) What research did the IBF do before approving string centers for Sport Bowling?

Before making this decision the IBF considered the results and learnings of the three federations that pioneered approval of string centers for Sport Bowling in their countries, beginning in 2017. Each of the three federations that approved string machines for Sport Bowling have consistently reported the following:

- (i) Bowling averages on string machines were very close to those bowled on free-fall machines
- (ii) String machines do not give the bowler any significant scoring advantage or disadvantage versus free-fall machines
- (iii) The bowler's ability to score is affected more substantially by other variables (such as the overall maintenance condition of the center's lanes and equipment and lane conditioning) and less by the pinspotting machine itself

4) Some people say that bowling on string machines is not "real bowling". Why is the IBF position different in this respect?

After careful considerations of the results and learnings of the three federations that pioneered approval of string centers, IBF concluded the following:

- Even if not identical, bowling on free fall or string machines is very much aligned
- Both string machines and free-fall machines require essentially the same bowling skills
- The sport of bowling is not corrupted nor damaged or diminished by the inclusion of approved string centers and string technology as an additional playing field. An additional playing field will only make the game and the sport of bowling more engaging, attractive and challenging for bowlers and fans alike.

The IBF acknowledges that slightly different techniques and adjustments may be required in some pin leave situations between string and free-fall machines. However, in IBF's view, this only enriches the sport and aligns with what is required already today to bowl at the highest levels of the sport. Being able to successfully adjust is one of the skills needed to be a sport bowler. This is not dissimilar to other sports such as Tennis, which allows tournaments on various surfaces, each with their own characteristics which affect the playing style of the game.

5) Which federations have certified string machine centers for Sport Bowling?

- The Canadian Tenpin Federation (CTF) in 2017
- The British Tenpin Bowling Association (BTBA) in 2018
- Tenpin Bowling Australia (TBA) in 2018

6) Can IBF member federations across the world now adopt string machines, following IBF approval?

Yes. The IBF is not only allowing, but is recommending, that member federations around the world certify string machine centers and do so following the published IBF requirements.

7) Where does the USBC stand in terms of certifying string machines for Sport Bowling?

To date the USBC has not publicly commented on certification of string machines or string centers for sport bowling. Like any other IBF member federation across the world, the USBC now has the support of the IBF to allow the use of string machines for Sport Bowling in the United States.

8) Who is responsible for developing specifications for bowling equipment?

The IBF, as the worldwide governing body for the sport of bowling, has always been responsible for bowling equipment specifications and approvals. This has not changed. Even if IBF specifications may mirror in some, or all cases, those of the USBC, the IBF is the institutional body responsible for specifications.

9) What part of the IBF Certified String Center Requirements are completely aligned with universally recognized requirements for Sport Bowling on free-fall machines?

The requirements for lanes, pin decks and gutters are identical to those universally recognized for Sport Bowling on free-fall machines today.

10) What part of the IBF Certified String Center Requirements have been taken from universally recognized requirements for Sport Bowling on free-fall machines and adapted for string machine centers?

The IBF adhered to universally recognized requirements for Sport Bowling on free-fall machines where possible, however some requirements were adapted considering fundamental differences between string machines and free-fall. Adapted specifications are:

- i. Kickback Height - The 17” minimum kickback height specification was kept but the upper 25” height limit was dropped. This is because string machines generally use taller kickbacks than free-fall machines. Taller heights of kickbacks do not impact scoring.

- ii. Kickback Material – The IBF decided to allow kickbacks to be made of materials other than the traditional solid hardwood, without testing, as long as the performance properties can be shown to be consistent with solid hardwood.
- iii. Kickback Plate Material – The IBF decided to allow kickback plates to be made from material other than the traditional IBF approved materials, without testing, as long as the performance properties can be shown to be consistent with the current IBF approved kickback plate materials.
- iv. Bowling Pins - A modification to the standard IBF approved bowling pin, for the purposes of attaching the string, was necessary.

11) Why are specifications on the string machines themselves not part of the IBF Compliant String Center Requirements?

The IBF wanted to ensure consistency across approved string machine centers and maximum alignment with free-fall centers. Based on current knowledge and experience with string machines the IBF did not find a need to address string machine specifications in order to achieve this goal. There are many variables that together, may have a higher impact on the scoring and play consistency within string or free-fall centers, over and above the pinspotting machine itself. These include oil pattern variation, oiling frequency, age of the pins, type of pins (wood vs. synthetic), condition of the lane surface, condition of the kickbacks and flat gutters, maintenance status of the pinspotting machine itself. For this reason the IBF Certified String Center Requirements focus on lanes, pin decks, gutters, kickbacks, kickback plates and pins only.

12) Will the IBF develop specifications for string machines, like those in place today for free fall machines?

The IBF does not have further plans to address string machine specifications. If new information arises which is deemed relevant for scoring and play consistency, sustainability, or other reasons, the IBF reserves the right to incorporate any changes as necessary.

Please feel to contact us on info@bowling.sport should you have any further question.